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# ISLĀM

A Prelection

DELIVERED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

MARCH 10, 1903

BY

STANLEY LANE-POOLE, M.A., LITT.D.  
PROFESSOR OF ARABIC



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## ISLĀM

I HAVE been asked to tell you, as well as I can within the compass of an hour, what Mohammadanism—or, to give it its right name, Islām—really is: assuming (I dare say very gratuitously) that you have made no study of it. But I shall take leave to tell you first of all what it is not. It is not heathenism. Nothing can be more absurd or misleading than the popular way of confounding all creeds that are not Christian under the opprobrious name of ‘heathen.’ It reminds me of a sergeant-major of the British Army of Occupation in Egypt whom I used to hear in Cairo on Sunday mornings at church parade giving the word of command in something like these terms: ‘Church of England one pace to the front; Roman Catholics stand fast; *miscellaneous religions* one pace to the rear.’ Islām is not a ‘mis-



cellaneous religion.' It is one of the three great missionary faiths of history, and you would be much nearer the mark if, instead of heathen, you called it a Christian heresy, which other Christians should recognize as true within its limits. You will often hear Allāh spoken of as though He were some pagan divinity. But Allāh is Arabic for '*the* God,' the one almighty Creator and eternal Ruler of the Universe, and there cannot be two such Gods. You may take it that the God of the Muslims is none other than our God.

I do not mean to say that the attributes of God as conceived by Muslims are always the same as those ascribed to Him by Christians. There is anthropomorphism in all creeds, and the mind will form its finite conception of God in different ways. But the image, though distorted in the mirror, is really the same. The Prophet Mohammad himself recognized this essential unity in the cardinal dogma of the revealed religions (Jewish and Christian) when he proclaimed 'Say unto the people of the Scriptures, Your

God and our God is One.' And that even Christians perceived something of this is shown by the amazing admission of Sebaeos, the contemporary Armenian bishop, who wrote: 'At this time a certain man of the sons of Ishmael, whose name was Mohamad, a merchant, appeared to his people, as it were by the order of God, preaching the truth. . . . Inasmuch as the command was from on high, by his sole behest all came together in a union of law, and forsaking vain idols, returned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham.'\*

A cynical writer has said that there are generally three forms of a creed: the form believed by the vulgar, the form professed by the learned, and the original form which nobody believes. I will not stop to discuss this opinion, but it is true that there are many and various forms of Islām which are not easily reconciled with the primitive teaching of Mohammad. If I were to try to explain to you the various tenets of the

\* A.J. BUTLER, *Arab Conquest of Egypt* (1902), 152 note.

saint-worshipping Berbers of Morocco, the Senūsī missionaries of the Sūdān, the Sūfī mystics of Persia and Anatolia, the orders of darwishes (or dervishes) who constitute the Salvation Army of Islām, the 'high and dry' Ulamā of Turkey, the crude beliefs of the Egyptian fellāh, who celebrates the ancient and not very respectable cult of Bubastis under the guise of a festival of a Muslim saint,—if I were to attempt to distinguish the conflicting views of Shī'as and Sunnīs, Divine-Right-men and private-reason-puritans, initiates and novices, metaphorical interpreters and upholders of the literal sense, philosophers, pantheists, and corybants, I should detain you not an hour but a year—that is, if you could be induced to stay.

Islām in its varied phases is full of elements derived from other systems—not merely the Hebrew, which is of course its true parent, for Mohammad declared that he was only reviving the faith of Abraham—but accretions in later times due to the

influence of Buddhism, of Greek philosophy, of neo-platonism and gnosticism, to say nothing of those primitive beliefs which underlie so many creeds and modify them in the same way as the aboriginal Finnish or Pictish population of this island has modified the successive races of invaders and made them (to adapt a familiar phrase) *Pictis ipsis pictiores*:—primitive beliefs which once meant so much to early man, but which we now class rather superciliously under the weary head of 'folklore.'

On all these varieties of foreign or aboriginal elements I cannot touch to-day. I must confine myself to the original form of Islām as taught by its Prophet and as still professed by the majority of the two hundred millions of Muslims scattered over the earth, from the Baltic to New Guinea, and from the Pillars of Hercules to the Great Wall of China, of whom more than sixty millions are our fellow-subjects in India and thus make King Edward the greatest Mohammadan sovereign in the world.

I take my stand upon the Korān, and the Korān is a veritable rock of documentary evidence. One of its chapters begins with the words 'This is a book in which there is no doubt,' and the assertion is justified. Of the date, authenticity, and textual accuracy of the Korān there is no doubt whatever. That it is also absolutely *sincere* is my firm conviction. It was taken down from the notes and memories of numerous contemporaries within a year of the Prophet's death in 632, collected by Mohammad's own amanuensis, and though revised twenty years later, with the collaboration of the same secretary, there is no reason to believe that any important changes were made by the revisers. They simply eliminated certain dialectal variants which were causing confusion in the public worship.

When I say that the Korān was taken down from the notes and memories of contemporaries—'from palm-leaves, skins, blade-bones, and the hearts of men' as it is recorded—you may perhaps think that memory is a

weak staff to rest upon. But you must remember that in the East in early times the practice of oral tradition was cultivated to a perfection unknown in these days when we can always turn to a book when we forget anything. The Arabs especially possessed most retentive and exact memories, and for centuries after the Prophet's death there were regular schools of traditionists who handed on the traditions orally with literal accuracy and preserved a strict pedigree of the line of its descent. To give an instance of the extraordinary memory of the Arab: there was once an Arabic lexicographer who compiled an immense dictionary. A fire broke out in his house and burned the whole work. The labour of years seemed to have vanished. But the learned man sat down next day, and began to dictate the entire dictionary from *alif* to *yē* from memory to his amanuenses, and those who had consulted the original ms. certified that the second copy was practically the same as the first.

There is no need for misgivings therefore

as to the accuracy of the Korān traditions. We may take the book as the literal speech of the Prophet—not in due sequence, indeed, but put together more or less haphazard, without any critical method,—but still the *ipsissima verba* of Mohammad.

Now what is the one master-doctrine of the Korān? ‘There is only one God.’ If one wishes to profess Islām the invariable simple formula is ‘There is no deity but God, and Mohammad is His Messenger.’ *Lā ilūha illa-llāh, wa Mohammadun rasūlu-llāh.* Say that before the recognized authority—the Kādi or judge—and you are at once accepted as a Muslim. There is no other profession of faith necessary to salvation in Islām.

It is simplicity itself: indeed it comprises the very minimum of religious belief. It merely affirms first a doctrine which is almost universally accepted by mankind—the existence of a Divine Creator—and secondly a very widespread theory of man’s relationship to God as renewed by

*Simplicity of creed*

II

revelation of Himself through successive inspired prophets.\* But the very simplicity of the creed seems to be a stumbling-block to some superior minds. It presents no opening for the solution of special intellectual difficulties, offers no occasion for theological subtleties, and is grasped with perfect ease by the very meanest intelligence. Moreover, they say, it is a cold abstraction; it is too rational; there is nothing here to touch the heart. Yet this creed was preached by Mohammad with a fiery enthusiasm unsurpassed in the world's history, and ever since it has kindled a like enthusiasm in his followers. Islām has had its martyrs, its flagellants and self-tormentors, its absorbed recluses and stern ascetics. Explain as we will its first overwhelming triumph over the greater part of the world known to the seventh century, the *orbis veteribus notus*, the fact of its persistence is not to be explained by migratory influx or the infectious power of

\* See the suggestive and learned work on *The Preaching of Islam* by T. W. ARNOLD, 336 et seqq.



success. Islām has held its own, and more than held its own, for thirteen centuries. Not a single country, except Spain, which ever adopted Islām has revolted from its allegiance. In India alone in the last twenty years it has increased by twelve millions, it is making immense strides in the Far East, and in Africa it is rapidly overcoming nearly the whole continent.

There must be something in a creed which can thus dominate a sixth part of the population of the globe. I believe that, making all allowance for contributory causes, Islām itself was the main cause both of its first triumph and of its apparently invincible endurance. And I think that the element in Islām which has most contributed to its expansion is the dogma of the Unity of God, which it has always proclaimed with a grandeur, a majesty, and above all with a *sure conviction* perhaps unsurpassed. This intense *conviction* which Islām is able to generate in its believers is, I think, one of the reasons of its wonderful success as a

missionary faith. No one ever doubts that a Muslim *believes in earnest*.

Mohammad conceived God as the Semitic mind has always preferred to think of Him, and as history shows that an immense number of people of all races and ages always do think of Him. His God is the All-Mighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Just. Irresistible Power is the first attribute he thinks of: the 'Lord of the Worlds,' the 'Author of the Heavens and the Earth,' 'who hath created Life and Death,' 'in whose hand is Dominion,' who 'cleaveth out the Dawn and maketh the Night to cover the Day'; 'the Thunder proclaimeth His perfection,' 'the whole earth is His handful, the heavens shall be folded together in His right hand.' God is the Wise, the Just, the True, the Swift in reckoning, who knoweth every ant's weight of good and ill that a man hath done, and who suffereth not the reward of the faithful to perish. Mohammad insisted on the Power and Majesty of God with a fiery eloquence and an inexhaustible wealth of imagery. The

Korān is full of *Benedicite omnia opera*. Take for example the 'Chapter of the Merciful' (lv):—

*'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.*  
 The Merciful hath taught the Korān ;  
 He created Man,  
 Taught him plain speech,  
 The Sun and the Moon in their courses,  
 And the plants and the trees do homage.  
 The Heaven, He raised it . . .  
 And the Earth, He furnished it for living things :  
 Therein is fruit, and the palm with spathes,  
 And grain with its husk, and the fragrant herb.  
*Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye \* deny ?*  
 And He created man of clay like a pot  
 And He made the demons of clear fire.  
*Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny ?*  
 Lord of the East,†  
 And Lord of the West.†  
*Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny ?*  
 He hath let loose the two seas that come together,  
 Yet between them is a barrier they cannot pass.  
*Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny ?*  
 His are the ships that tower like hills upon the sea.

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\* Lit. 'ye two' ; the prophet addresses both men and demons (ginn, genii).

† Lit, 'two Easts', 'two Wests', i.e. the points where the sun rises, or sets, in summer and winter respectively.



*The witness of Nature*

15

*Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny?*

All on the earth passeth away,

But the face of thy Lord abideth full of majesty and honour.

*Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny?*

All things in Heaven and Earth beseech Him : every day is He at work.

*Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny? . . .*

Blessed be the name of thy Lord, full of majesty and honour.'

In the earlier speeches of Mohammad—for modern criticism enables us to rearrange the Korān in approximately chronological order—the one aim of the Prophet is to call his hearers to the worship of the One God. There is hardly a word of other doctrines, still less of ritual or social ordinances. Every speech is directed to the grand design of the Prophet's life, to convince men of the majesty of the One God, who brooks no rivals, and rewards or punishes men according to their deeds. This early portion of the Korān is one long blazonry of nature's beauty and wonder.\* Mohammad had not

\* See my *Studies in a Mosque*, 128 et seqq., and *Speeches and Table-talk of the Prophet Mohammad*, xxxvii-xl.

lived among the sheepfolds in vain, and spent long solitary nights, gazing at the silent heaven—which yet spoke clearly to *him*—and watching the dawn break over the hills. He appeals to the people to credit the evidence of their own eyes; he calls to witness the wonders of nature, the stars in their courses, the sun and moon, the dawn cleaving asunder the veil of night, the life-giving rain, the fruits of the earth, life and death, change and decay, beginning and ending—all are ‘signs of God’s power, if only ye would understand!’

These early speeches of the Korān are short and impassioned. They are pitched too high to be long sustained. We feel that we have to do with a poet, as well as a preacher, and that his poetry costs him too much to be spun out. The words are those of a man whose whole heart is in his subject, and they carry with them even now the impression of the burning vehemence with which they were hurled forth. Take the pictures of the Last Day. The Judgement is

an ever present reality to Mohammad. He is never weary of depicting its terror. He cannot find names enough to qualify it. It is the Hour, the Inevitable, the Calamity, the Overwhelming, the Difficult Day, the Smiting:—

‘The Smiting! what is the smiting?  
And what shall teach thee what is the Smiting?  
The day when men shall be like moths, adrift,  
And the hills shall be like wool-flocks rift!  
Then as for him whose scale is heavy, his shall be a  
life of bliss.  
And as for him whose scale is light, a place in the  
Pit is his!  
And what shall tell thee what that place is?  
A Fire that blazes.’ (ci.)\*

Or again:—

‘When the heaven is rent asunder  
And the stars are scattered  
And the seas are let loose  
And the tombs overturned,—  
The soul shall know what it hath done and left  
undone.

\* Here I have tried, very imperfectly, to reproduce something of the riming effect of the original. See *Speeches*, 183.

O man ! what hath deceived thee about thy generous  
Lord,  
Who created thee and fashioned thee and moulded  
thee aright ?  
In the form it pleased Him, He builded thee,  
Nay ! But ye take the Judgement for a lie !  
But surely there are Watchers over you,  
Trusty recorders,  
Knowing what ye do.  
Verily the righteous shall be in delight,  
And the wicked in Hell-fire,  
They shall be burnt at it on the Day of Doom  
And shall not be able to hide from it.  
And what shall teach thee what is the Day of  
Judgement ?  
Again, what shall teach thee what is the Day of  
Judgement ?  
A day when one soul is powerless for another, for on  
that day the ordering is with God.' (lxxxii.)

Mohammad's conception of God is well brought out in a later speech—'chapter' is a foolish word, at least for these earlier orations of the Korān—which I shall quote in the late Professor Palmer's spirited rendering :—

'Say: Whose is what is in the heavens and the earth ?

‘Say: God’s, who has imposed mercy on Himself.

‘With Him are the keys of the unseen. None knows them save He. He knows what is in the land and in the sea, and there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth. . . .

‘He it is who takes you to Himself at night, and knows what ye have gained in the day; then He raises you up again, that your appointed time may be fulfilled. Then unto Him is your return, and He will inform you of what ye have done.

‘Verily, God it is who cleaves out the grain and the date stone;

‘He brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living. There is God! How then can ye be beguiled?

‘It is He who cleaves out the morning, and makes night a repose, and the sun and moon two reckonings—that is the decree of the Mighty, the Wise.

‘There is God for you, your Lord! There is no God but He, the Creator of everything: then worship Him, for He o’er everything keeps guard.

‘Sight perceives Him not, but He perceives men’s sight; for He is the subtle, the aware.

‘Say, Verily my prayers and my devotion, and my life and my death, belong to God, the Lord of the Worlds.’  
(vi.)

Take one more example of the magnificent imagery of the Korān—this from the



‘Chapter of Light’ (xxiv), which belongs to the late Medina period, when the Prophet’s poetic outbursts had become more rare :—

‘God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like a niche in which is a lamp within a glass, a glass as it were a glittering star. It is lit from a holy tree, an olive neither of the east nor the west, the oil of which would almost shine by itself though no fire were put to it : light upon light ! God guideth whom He pleaseth to His Light. . . .

‘In the houses God hath suffered to be raised, for His name to be celebrated therein, men magnify Him at morn and eve ; men whom neither merchandise nor trafficking divert from remembering God and being instant in prayer and giving alms, fearing the day when hearts and eyes shall blench ; that God may recompense them for the best that they have wrought, and give them increase of His grace ; for God provideth without stint for whom He willeth.

‘But those who disbelieve are like a mirage in a plain : the thirsty thinketh it water, but when he cometh to it he findeth nothing : but he findeth God there. . . .

‘Or like black night on a deep sea, which wave upon wave doth cover, and cloud upon wave—gloom upon gloom—when one putteth out his hand he can scarce see it ; for to whom God giveth not light, he hath no light.

‘Hast thou not seen that what is in the heavens and

the earth magnifieth God, and the birds on the wing? each one knoweth its prayer and its praise, and God knoweth what they do. For God's is the empire of the heavens and the earth, and to Him must all things return.'

To the Muslims themselves no verse in the Korān is more impressive than that of the Throne—the celebrated *Ayat el-Kursī* in Chap. II :

'God, there is no God but He, the Living, the Steadfast. Slumber overtaketh Him not, nor sleep. Whatsoever is in the Heavens and whatsoever in the Earth is His. Who is there that shall plead with Him, save by His leave? He knoweth what was before, and what shall come after, and none can compass aught of His knowledge unless He will it. His Throne is a canopy over the Heavens and the Earth, and the keeping of them is no burthen to Him : for He is the High, the Great.'

But with all this Might, which is the dominant aspect of God in Islām, there is also the gentleness which belongs to great strength. God is the guardian over His servants, the Shelterer of the orphan, the Deliverer from every affliction. In His hand is Good, and He is the Generous Lord,

the Gracious, the Hearer, the Near-at-hand — I am still quoting the words of the Korān. Every speech begins with the invocation, 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,' and Mohammad constantly dwells on the tenderness of God which he says is greater than the mother-bird's for her young. Perhaps the most touching expression of the Prophet's trust in the goodness of God is found in a speech which must have been uttered in an hour of deep depression: it is called 'The Morning Splendour' (xciii):—

*'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.*

By the Morning Splendour

And by the still of Night!

Thy Lord hath not forsaken thee nor despised thee.

And surely the future will be better for thee than now,

And thy Lord will surely give to thee, and thou shalt be well pleased.

Did He not find thee an orphan and sheltered thee?

And found thee erring and guided thee?

Then as for the orphan, oppress him not.

And as for him who asketh of thee, chide him not away.

And as for the goodness of thy Lord, speak of it.'

There is no doubt, however, that the fear, and not the love, of God is the dominant note in Islām. There is more of the Potter who shapes the clay than of the Father pitying His children. And this accounts for its want of spirituality. Islām is a religion of practical righteousness, done in the fear of God and with a very distinct foreboding of the pains of Hell. It is curiously wanting in the higher spiritual emotions. Not the grace of God, but His fore-ordaining will, prompts men to do right. And they do right for a definite reward and in dread of a definite penalty, not because they wish to be nearer and more like God. This gives in our Western minds a hardness and a coldness to Islām which are repugnant to those who realize what spiritual life means, but which do not appear to chill the devotion and enthusiasm of its followers. I am speaking of course of *orthodox* Islām. If we turn to the heretical sects, to the Persian Sūfis especially, and the darwīsh orders, we shall find an intensely emotional religion, often with an

exalted spirituality. In Persia, as has been well said, religion is not a question of faith and righteousness, but of knowledge and mystery; not a rule to live by and a hope to die in, but a key to unlock the secrets of the spiritual universe; not a matter of work and charity, but of rest and wisdom.\* It was a poet of the Persian Sūfis, those Quietists of the East, who wrote these striking lines:—  
'O God! If I worship Thee for fear of Hell, send me to Hell, and if I worship Thee in hopes of Heaven, withhold Heaven from me; but if I worship Thee *for Thine own sake*, then hide not from me the Eternal Beauty.'† That is an idea which could never enter the mind of the orthodox Muslim.

The doctrine of one supreme God, to whose will it is the duty of every man to surrender himself, is the kernel of Islām—the very word means 'resignation,' 'self-

\* See E. G. BROWNE, *Lit. Hist. of Persia*, 405.

† *Id.*, *ibid.*, 426.

surrender.' That is the truth for which Mohammad lived and suffered persecution and at last triumphed. It was no new doctrine, as he himself constantly repeated. It had been taught by many prophets, above all by Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. But people had not hearkened, or had forgotten or corrupted their teaching. So Mohammad was sent, not different from them (according to his conception of them), but a simple Messenger, even confessedly unable to work miracles or to speak with tongues,—yet, as he held, the last, the final messenger, the 'seal of prophecy.'

This is the second article of the creed: 'Mohammad is the Apostle of God.' Not the only apostle, observe, not the sole commissioner of the Most Merciful, not the only bringer of truth, but one of a long chain of messengers. So far did Mohammad go in reverence of his forerunners, that he said these remarkable words: 'Whosoever shall testify that there is One God, and that Mohammad is His servant and messenger,

and that Jesus Christ is His servant and messenger, and that he is the son of the handmaid of God, and that he is the Word of God, the Word which was sent to Mary and the Spirit from God, and shall testify that there is truth in Heaven and Hell, will enter into Paradise, of whatever sins he may be guilty.' Muslims always speak of the Saviour as 'our Lord Jesus'—Sayyidnā 'Īsā—and in their respect they are only following the example of their Prophet.

There is no such thing in orthodox Islām as worship of Mohammad, or asking for his intercession with God. 'I am no more than a man,' he said. 'When I order you with respect to religion, receive it; but when I order you about the affairs of the world, I am nothing more than a man.' And again when it was asked him whether he had not special privileges with God, he firmly denied. 'Do none enter heaven save by God's mercy?' 'None, none, none,' he answered. 'Not even you, O Prophet?' Then he put his hand on his head and said solemnly

thrice, 'Neither shall I enter, except God cover me with His Mercy.' That ignorant Muslims invoke Mohammad is no more a charge against his teaching than the invocation of saints in some churches is a reproach against primitive Christianity. Nothing can emphasize the relative importance of the prophet and his doctrine better than the striking scene which happened immediately after his death. 'Omar, the fiery-hearted, the Simon Peter of Islām, rushed into the dazed and doubting crowd, and fiercely told them they lied, it could not be true, Mohammad was *not* dead! Then Abū-Bekr came forward and said in his quiet voice: 'Ye People, he that hath worshipped Mohammad, let him know that Mohammad is dead; but he that hath worshipped God, that the Lord liveth and cannot die.'

The belief in God and His Prophet, and the Book revealed to him, implies the belief in the Resurrection, the Judgement, rewards and punishments, Heaven and Hell; also



in angels and demons. The superstition, anthropomorphism, and often the absurdity of the forms in which these beliefs are imaged in the Korān are a familiar weapon of attack upon the creed. It is easy of course to take the historical point of view and say that here we have the crude ideas of an uncultivated Arab of the seventh century, full of the fancies floating in Arabia in his day. But this point of view is inapposite when we are dealing with what claims to be revealed religion, the literal word of God written down in the 'Mother of the Book' which lies open before the Throne throughout all ages. These childish and often revolting pictures of Heaven and Hell acquire a terrible meaning when it is understood that millions upon millions of people take them as literal facts. I believe there is no doubt whatever that the majority of orthodox Muslims do so accept them—though I do not think they dwell much upon them—and that those who interpret them allegorically are only a few of the higher minds. 'Rational

Muslims,' like Sayyid Amīr Alī, a judge of the High Court at Calcutta, seek to explain them away, and any rational person who embraces Islām must, one would think, interpret them in a different sense from the plain meaning. But there is no authority in Islām itself for any such interpretation. That Mohammad believed them quite literally is beyond doubt—they were very real to him—and that is a sufficient reason for his followers to believe them too. The fact is that in orthodox Islām there is no elasticity, no room for development. What the Prophet said is true, and there can be no increase or diminution of the truth : such is the received opinion. Yet Mohammad himself seemed to foresee a development in religion. 'Ye are in an age,' he said once, 'in which if ye abandon one-tenth of what is ordered, ye will be destroyed. After this a time will come when he who shall observe one-tenth of what is now ordered will be saved.' But no Muslim theologian, so far as I know, has ever founded a theory of

development or revision upon this text. The creed, in the orthodox view, is fixed and final—exactly what it was in the seventh century.

Islām, it has been said, lies more in doing than in believing. No religion certainly teaches more emphatically that ‘faith without works is dead.’ ‘Righteousness,’ says the Korān, ‘is not in turning your face to the east or the west; but this is righteousness—to believe in God and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Scripture, and the Prophets, and to give your substance for the love of God to your kindred, and the orphan, and the needy, and the son of the road, and all who ask, and for the freeing of slaves, and to be instant in prayer and give [the prescribed] alms, to fulfil your covenant when ye covenant, to be patient in adversity and affliction and in time of violence. These are the true in heart, and these are they who fear God’ (ii, 172). After the *profession of faith*, the four duties of the Muslim

are *prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mekka.*

The five stated prayers every day, each consisting of prescribed forms, with accompanying ritual and ablutions, added to the Friday congregational prayers in the mosque, are the most important religious duties laid upon Muslims. It has been objected that they are lifeless forms, vain repetitions, without personal emotion. There is, no doubt, much repetition in the prayers of Islām, but iteration need not kill devotion. We repeat the *Pater noster* frequently in our church offices, and the Muslims have also a prayer which they repeat as often as we do the Lord's Prayer. It is the opening chapter of the Korān :

*' In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.  
Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds,  
The Compassionate, the Merciful,  
King of the Day of Judgement !  
Thee we worship, and to Thee we turn for help.  
Guide us in the straight way,  
The way of those with whom Thou art well-pleased,  
Not of those upon whom is Thy wrath, nor the erring.'*

Iterative as the prayers may be, there is something deeply impressive in the sight of a congregation of Muslims, not seated in pews with cushions, and hassocks, and gilt-edged books, listening to a well-trained choir, but kneeling humbly on the floor, with heads bowed to the dust, chanting each his supplications. Renan said that he never witnessed the prayers in a mosque without wishing he were a Muslim. There is one thing about their prayers which might teach even Christians a lesson. They are never ashamed of them. When the hour of prayer comes, they kneel down, wherever they are, in the shop, in the street, on a journey, visiting a friend. There is no self-consciousness, and nothing is allowed to interfere with prayer. When that somewhat sanguinary despot, the late Amīr of Afghanistan, was at a function at Windsor, the hour of prayer surprised him in the midst of the court; but he had a carpet spread in a corner, and said his prayers not only *coram populo*, but *coram regina*. I should be surprised to see anyone

doing the like in S. Patrick's Hall! I must say that our brothers of the Latin branch of the Catholic Church set us a good example in this respect. I confess I like to see them uncovering their heads in the public street as they pass their holy places.

But if there is some formality and much repetition in the prescribed prayers of Islām, there are intervals set apart for private supplication, and Mohammad frequently enjoins private prayer at home and praises him who 'passes the night worshipping God.' 'Angels,' he said, 'come amongst you night and day; then those of the night ascend to heaven, and God asks them how they left His creatures: and they answer "We left them at prayer, and we found them at prayer."' "

The great fast of Ramadān is too well known to need much comment. It lasts from sunrise to sunset throughout the entire month, and neither food nor water nor even tobacco smoke must pass the lips of the faster. As the lunar year of the East

necessarily shifts the months round, Rama-dān falls sometimes in summer, and it may be imagined what a tax the fast is in long summer days to the people working in the fields under the blazing sun: but I never heard of an Egyptian peasant who broke the fast. Mohammad ordained this stern rule for the chastening of his able-bodied followers; but he was no admirer of useless mortification of the flesh, and ordained that sick and weakly persons were not to injure their health by fasting. He did not wish to try men beyond their strength. 'God wishes to make things easy to you,' he said, 'for man was created weak.' Nor did he admit that the most rigorous fasting could atone for sins: 'A keeper of fasts,' he said, 'who doth not abandon lying and slandering, God careth not about his leaving off eating and drinking.' One of the most striking things about Mohammad is his sound common-sense.

At the same time, with all allowance for what we may call dispensations of duties for

the weaker brethren, his religion, as Carlyle said, 'is not an easy one: with rigorous fasts, lavations, strict complex formulas, prayers five times a day, and abstinence from wine, it did not succeed by being an easy religion.'

The pilgrimage has been cited as an example of idle superstition. I do not deny the superstition, but it was far from idle. It was natural that Mohammad should retain a deep reverence for the temple which was associated with his earliest devotions and with the devotions of his family, his tribe, and his race, in spite of the idolatry which had been practised in the Kaaba. It is impossible to defend the curious rites of the pilgrimage, as conducted ever since his time, from the charge of gross superstition. But there were valid reasons for the preservation of time-honoured ceremonies. Mohammad knew the consolidating effect of a centre to which his followers could gather, and hence he re-asserted the sanctity of the Black Stone which came down from heaven, and



ordained that everywhere throughout the world the Muslim should pray with his face towards the Kaaba, and that all who were able should make the pilgrimage to the focus of Islām. Mekka is to the Muslim what Jerusalem is to the Jew. It bears with it all the influence of centuries of associations. It carries the Muslim back to the cradle of his faith, the childhood of his Prophet, and the proclaiming of the one God. And most of all it bids him remember that all his brother Muslims are worshipping towards the same sacred spot; that he is one of a great company of believers, united in one faith, filled with the same hope, fearing the same God.

The brotherhood of all Muslims is one of the strongest influences that make for the propagation of the faith. Islām is a kind of caste or freemasonry. Once you are admitted to it, you are the equal before God of every one else within it, and the superior of all outside it. Mr. Meredith Townsend\* has

\* *Asia and Europe*, 55.

noted the effect of this brotherhood upon the Hindu convert. 'The missionaries of Islam,' he writes, 'did not and do not ask him to abandon caste, but only to exchange his caste for theirs, the largest, the most strictly bound, and the proudest of all, a caste which claims not only a special relation to God, but the right of ruling absolutely the remainder of mankind. Once in this caste, the Hindu convert would be the brother of all within it, hailed as an equal and treated as an equal, even up to that point on which European theories of equality always break down, the right of intermarriage. John Brown, who died gladly for the negro slave, would have killed his daughter rather than see her marry a negro; but the Muslim will accept the negro [Muslim] as son-in-law, as friend, or as king.' Is there any one of us who would do the like for an Armenian Christian, let alone a negro? This theory—but it is more than theory—this *fact* of the brotherhood and equality of all Muslims is a most powerful element in Islām. It gives each

member a dignity and independence and self-respect which it were hard to find in any other system. If only they had a similar conception of the sisterhood and equality of women, Muslim society would approach the ideal.

When we come to consider the social regulations, the minute details of ritual, the legal penalties, and all the complex system which we now see in the East, we shall be surprised how little of it is to be found in the Korān.\* Mohammad had no desire to make a new code of jurisprudence, or to bind his followers to a strict ritual. He seldom volunteered a legal decision, except when a distinct abuse had to be removed, and the judicial verses in the Korān are evidently replies to questions put to him in his capacity as Governor of Medīna. He would seem to have distrusted himself as a lawgiver, for he cautioned his followers that

\* I have attempted to summarize the religious law of the Korān in *Speeches of Mohammad*, 133-144.

when he spoke to them on worldly matters he spoke merely as a man. In point of fact he left most of the old Arab customs untouched, as the law of the land, except when they were manifestly unjust or immoral in his eyes.

For example, you will nowhere find it distinctly laid down in the Korān that a man may marry four wives, though this is the accepted law in Muslim countries—a permission, I am happy to say, ‘more honoured in the breach than the observance.’ Comparatively few Muslims care to avail themselves of it, and the obstacles which are now placed in the way of the slave trade, though still far from effective, will in time do much to reduce another form of polygamy which is even more objectionable. The only pronouncement in the Korān on which the four wives principle is founded is the following enigmatic sentence: ‘If ye fear that ye cannot do justice between orphans, then marry such women as are lawful to you, by twos or threes or fours; and if ye cannot be impartial, then only one, or what your right

hands possess [i.e. slaves]; that is the chief thing, that ye be not unfair [to them].’ Truly a delightful nut for lawyers to crack! Whatever may be said of the chivalrous ideas set forth in pre-Islāmic Arab poetry, women were in an unhappy position in Arabian towns in Mohammad’s time. The Prophet could hardly be expected to rise wholly above the ideas of his age, and it must be confessed that his personal opinion of women was not exalted. ‘Woman,’ he said (according to the Traditions), ‘was made out of a crooked rib of Adam. If you try to straighten it, it will break; and if you leave it alone, it will always remain crooked.’ And again, ‘I stood at the gate of Heaven, and lo! most of its inhabitants were the poor: and I stood at the gate of Hell, and lo! most of its inhabitants were women!’

This is probably the basis of the erroneous idea that women, according to the Korān, have no souls and cannot go to Heaven. On the contrary, the Prophet said, ‘Every woman who dieth, *and her husband is satisfied*

*with her*, shall enter into Paradise'—a saying which offers a distinct premium to patient Grizels. We are also told, however, that when woman was created, the Devil was delighted, and said in his joy 'Thou art half of my host, and the holder of my secret, and thou art mine arrow, with which I shoot and miss not!' Acting upon the Prophet's theory of woman, the Caliph 'Omar said 'Consult them, and do *the contrary of what they advise.*' 'I have not left any calamity more hurtful to man than woman,' said Mohammad: yet, with charming inconsistency, he added 'The world and all things in it are valuable, but the most valuable thing in the world is a virtuous woman.' And if we inquire what a virtuous woman is, he will answer 'Verily the best of women are those who are content with little.' Mohammad's ideal of a 'beautiful well-disposed wife' was one who obeys her husband in everything, is happy if he even looks at her, and who takes care of his property. If a wife did not obey, she must be

admonished, says the Korān, and taken into a bedchamber and beaten.

It will be seen that Mohammad was not very modern in his ideas of women. Yet he did much to improve the condition of the Arab women of his time. Such laws as there are in the Korān in relation to women (and these are the most minute and detailed in the whole book) are at least considerate. Polygamy was much restricted and monogamy recommended, prohibited degrees of marriage were instituted, divorce regulated, and a fit maintenance from the husband for the divorced wife established by law; women were created for the first time heirs-at-law, and widows were no longer to be treated as mere hereditaments, like other chattels of the deceased husband. 'Divorce,' said the Prophet, 'is lawful, but disliked by God.' Taking his time and his opinions, we could hardly expect Mohammad to have done more, and we must never forget that the whole attitude of the East towards sexual questions is quite different from ours. But

there can be no doubt that he missed a great opportunity, and that his failure to set women on their true level has done more harm than anything else to Muslim society. The degradation of women in the East is a canker that begins its destructive work even in childhood, and has eaten into the whole system of Islām. The *Princess* said well:—

‘The Woman’s cause is Man’s: they rise or sink  
Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free.’

The fact that this complicated system—not only as regards women, but in respect of most of the regulations of Muslim law and custom—is not to be found laid down *literatim* in the Korān might encourage the hope that a reform might be made, a definite breach with tradition, and a return to the early elastic teaching of the Prophet. But unfortunately the Korān, though it is the ultimate authority, is not the sole basis of Islām. It does not even contain all the utterances of Mohammad which have the force of law. Besides his public speeches,



he naturally talked in private, and, equally naturally, the private conversation and personal habits of so holy and venerated a personage were minutely observed and recorded. The collection of these records is called the *Sunna* or Traditions. The Traditions are the unofficial, whilst the Korān is the official utterance of the Prophet. The one is his table talk, the other his pastorals. The Latin Church lays down that when the Bishop of Rome speaks as Head of the Church, he is infallible: but when his Holiness speaks merely as a man, he is liable to error. The distinction is just: because the head of a church, or of a state, or an ambassador speaking for his sovereign, will think very carefully before he commits himself to a pronouncement *ex cathedra*, whilst his *obiter dicta* may be ill-considered and of no value.

Mohammad's *obiter dicta* are the Traditions. They are generally full of that common sense which was his characteristic; they are often informing on the true

meaning of principles obscurely referred to in the Korān ; they are occasionally diverting, sometimes disgusting—not seldom puerile, like those *marginalia* which Dean Swift scribbled in his copy of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, now preserved in Archbishop Marsh's Library, and which editors have laboriously collated, only to prove how pettish a great man can be when off his guard. In the same way Muslim veneration has preserved a multitude of Mohammad's 'unconsidered trifles' of conversation which might very well have been forgotten. For example :—

'The bell is the Devil's musical instrument.' 'The angels do not enter a house in which is a dog, or pictures.' 'Every painter is in hell-fire : and whosoever draweth a picture shall be punished by ordering him to breathe a spirit into it, and this he can never do.'

There are many much more absurd than these. On the other hand some of his private sayings are very striking and beautiful, such as these :—

'When God created the world, He wrote a book,

which is near Him upon the Sovereign Throne, and what is written in it is this: *Verily my compassion overcometh my wrath.*

'Say not, if people do good to us, we will do good to them, but if they oppress us we will oppress them. But resolve that if people do good to you, you will do good to them, and if they oppress you, oppress them *not* again: ' a thought which seems an echo of the Gospel.

'God saith—he who seeketh to approach me one cubit, I will draw near to him two fathoms: and he who walketh towards me, I will run towards him; and he who cometh before me with a worldful of sins, but joins no other god to me, I will come before him with as great a front of forgiveness.'

Some people killed a goat, and when the Prophet asked what remained, they told him nothing but a shoulder, for all the rest had been given away to the poor. 'Nay,' said Mohammad, 'it is the whole goat that remains, except its shoulder: that remaineth which they have given away, for its rewards are eternal.'

'He is not strong who throws people down, but he is strong who keeps himself from anger.'

'The calamity of knowledge is forgetfulness, and to lose knowledge is this, to speak of it to the unworthy.'

'The heart of the old is always young in two things, in love of the world, and length of hope.'

'Whoso comforteth a woman who has lost her child will be clothed with a robe of honour in Heaven.'

'Wish not for death: for the doer of good may per-adventure do more good, and the doer of ill may repent and be forgiven.'

It was quite natural that the Muslims should treasure up the chance words of their Prophet: but, unlike the Latin Church, they make very little distinction between private and the official pronouncements. They do indeed differ as to the authenticity of individual traditions and the value of the six standard collections of the Sunna—the *Sihāh as-Sitta*—but all agree that a genuine tradition must be obeyed. For purposes of law, ritual, and even dogma, the Traditions are practically as valid as the Korān itself. But, taking them critically, it is obvious that they are not really so authentic, because they were not collected till long after the Korān. The six standard collections are none earlier than two hundred years after Mohammad's death, and the fact that of more than half a million

traditions only about 8000 passed the test of genuineness, such as it was, and that the Shi'as have a different set of traditions from the orthodox Sunnīs, shows that these *obiter dicta* have not the same indubitable authenticity as the Korān. Nor should they have the same authority, since they were not pronounced solemnly *ex cathedra*, and Muslim theologians themselves dispute the exact *degree* of inspiration attaching to them. And from internal evidence they are clearly of a different character from the Korān: they have not the *afflatus*. But all this does not prevent their acceptance as a foundation of faith. Just as the Jews set up the Talmud in the place of the Pentateuch, and as in the Middle Ages the learned taught the *Summa Theologica* of S. Thomas Aquinas instead of the New Testament, so the Muslims have erected the table-talk of the Prophet into a shrine of divine truth, which Mohammad himself certainly never intended it to be.

But this is not all. Neither the Korān nor the Traditions provide for every possible

difficulty. Many matters of importance are not laid down in them at all, or if they are they are expressed in doubtful or even conflicting terms. In the Christian Church, when such problems arose, they were decided by a General Council. Islām knows no church, has no priests, no bishops, no organization to furnish a General Council. What then could be done to determine vexed points? The Muslims were not long in discovering a further authority. First of all there was the principle of *Ijmā'*, or what we should call 'the general consent of the Fathers.' It is the third great foundation of Islām, and consists in the collected opinions of the *Tābi'ūn* or Companions of the Prophet, his immediate disciples. But it is not everyone who can draw a just conclusion from these opinions. It needs the most profound theological training, a perfect acquaintance with the *Korān* and the Traditions, and a full knowledge of the character and trustworthiness of each traditionist and disciple. The science of deducing decisions from these

materials is called *Ijtihād*, or 'investigation,' and the highest rank of Muslim theologian and lawyer (for the two are inseparable) is that of the Mujtāhid or doctor capable of drawing these decisions. In theory, any scholar of sufficient learning may aspire to this rank; but in practice, the power of making these decisions is understood to be limited to the four leading Mujtāhids, the Imāms who founded the four schools of orthodox Muslim theology, the Hanafī, Mālikī, Shafī'i, and Hanbalī. These four differ in the value they attach to authority and the weight they allow to private reason, or rather to the judgement of the founder of the school, for nobody else is allowed to exercise private judgement. When all four Imāms agree, their opinion is binding upon all orthodox Muslims. But whether they agree or not, their decisions are the last words in the theology and jurisprudence and ritual of Islām. They all lived in the eighth to the ninth century, but their judgements cannot be revised in the light of later dis-

coveries or modern criticism. In the present day in India no Kādī can give any judgement that is not in accordance with the judgement of the four Imāms.

What then is to be done if a new case arises which is not provided for in the Korān, the Sunna, or the Ijmā' of the four Imāms? You must proceed by *Kiyās* or analogy. For instance, the Prophet forbade the drinking of fermented date juice. Hence it is deduced that he forbade wine; and arguing by analogy the Wahhābīs or puritans of Arabia maintain that tobacco, being a narcotic, is equally forbidden by implication. Of course almost anything may be deduced by the fertile expedient of analogy, in spite of the precise rules for its application laid down by Muslim theologians, and it is not surprising that there should be no general accord in the results. For example there are Muslims who maintain that champagne is permissible, because Mohammad could not have forbidden what was unknown in his day.



In fact, and as a matter of history, the theory of Mohammadan theologians is that the Korān 'containeth all things necessary to salvation,' but that it is explained and defined by the aid of the Traditions and the deductions of the four Imāms. The whole body of doctrine is there, and not merely theological doctrine, but law, ritual, and all the minute details of Muslim life. It was all fixed in the Korān and crystallized in the interpretation of the divines of the ninth century. No advance, no change, has been admitted in orthodox Islām during the past thousand years. No change can be admitted in thousands of years to come. That is the orthodox position.

No doubt it has its advantages. The mass of mankind require their religion cut and dried. Kuenen said, 'If you would win the great masses, give them the truth in rounded form, neat and clear.' They do not want to think for themselves. They are thankful to have everything laid down for them with absolute certainty. Islām does this for them.

It gives them a perfectly simple creed which anyone can understand, and it tells them that it is the only true creed, and that those who follow it are absolutely sure of Heaven. Hence the note of conviction which impresses everyone who comes in contact with Muslims. They are perfectly sure they are right. They have no doubts, no uncomfortable problems of modern science to be reconciled with religion: their creed is true, let all else be as it may. And this certainty extends to the most trifling details of life. Not only every bending of the body and raising of the hands in the prayers is clearly laid down for them, but the ordinary etiquette of everyday manners. A Muslim always knows what to do, where to take his place, what to say. It is all down, so to speak, in his catechism. Nothing has contributed more to the spread of Islām, next to its supreme doctrine of the One God, than the precision with which every act is prescribed. The whole duty of man is settled once for all for the follower of Mo-hammad. He never has to puzzle his brains about it.

But the drawbacks of this precision outweigh its merits. It is well to have no uncertainty in your faith; but what if that faith is mixed up with superstitions and social customs which may have been tolerable in Arabia in the seventh century but which are impossible to educated and civilized men in the twentieth century? The central doctrine of Islām is sublime; but the social system contains details which must be degrading to all but a type of mankind that is already degraded. Among savage and semi-savage peoples, as in Africa, Islām has done a splendid work, and raised them out of unspeakable depths to a state of self-respect and comparative morality. A Muslim is incontestably a far higher type of man than a heathen. Among educated people, on the other hand, its influence is far less elevating, and often inoperative. The philosophic Persian calls himself a Muslim but takes refuge in mysticism. The cultivated Turk professes Islām, and consoles his indifference with cognac. The thoughtful educated Indian uses his own judgement about re-

ligion, and believes so much of Islām as he considers rational. But to make Islām rational, you must throw over the entire system of authority that has been elaborately built up and accepted for thirteen hundred years ; and once authority is cast aside, the sanction of the creed disappears. It is quite possible to be a philosophic Muslim, in accord with modern ideas. There are a few such, and they are good as well as intelligent men. But they are not the men to spread the faith over a quarter of the globe as the unphilosophical Arabs carried it in the seventh century, and as countless unpaid unorganized missionaries, traders, clerks, dervishes, of all classes, but all inspired by the same zeal, are carrying it now. The moment private judgement is admitted, the old sure conviction, the restfulness of indubitable authority, the enthusiasm of unshakable faith, vanish.

I do not propose to discuss the difficult question whether a reform of Islām is possible. There are some, whose opinion is weighty, who think it is ; who believe that it is possible to throw over tradition and

theological refinements, and to get back to the Korān alone; and having got back to the Korān alone, to treat it eclectically, to eliminate temporary and local elements, to ignore the social regulations, and to accept only its teaching on the great truths of religion. I hope it may be possible, but I confess I feel little confidence in it. Rationalizing such a creed is a very destructive process. But whilst I cannot view with much hope the purifying of the gold of Islām from the dross of its origin and history, I wish you to remember that there is gold in it. Among what are called the unprogressive races it has done a noble work in bringing millions to the worship of the One God and the practice of a by no means easy or self-indulgent ideal of conduct. It is the only form of monotheism which has ever commended itself to a very wide section of the Eastern world. And it is a form of monotheism which, amidst much that must offend and repel us, possesses a sublimity, a majesty, and a power over men's hearts that entitle it to our profound respect.

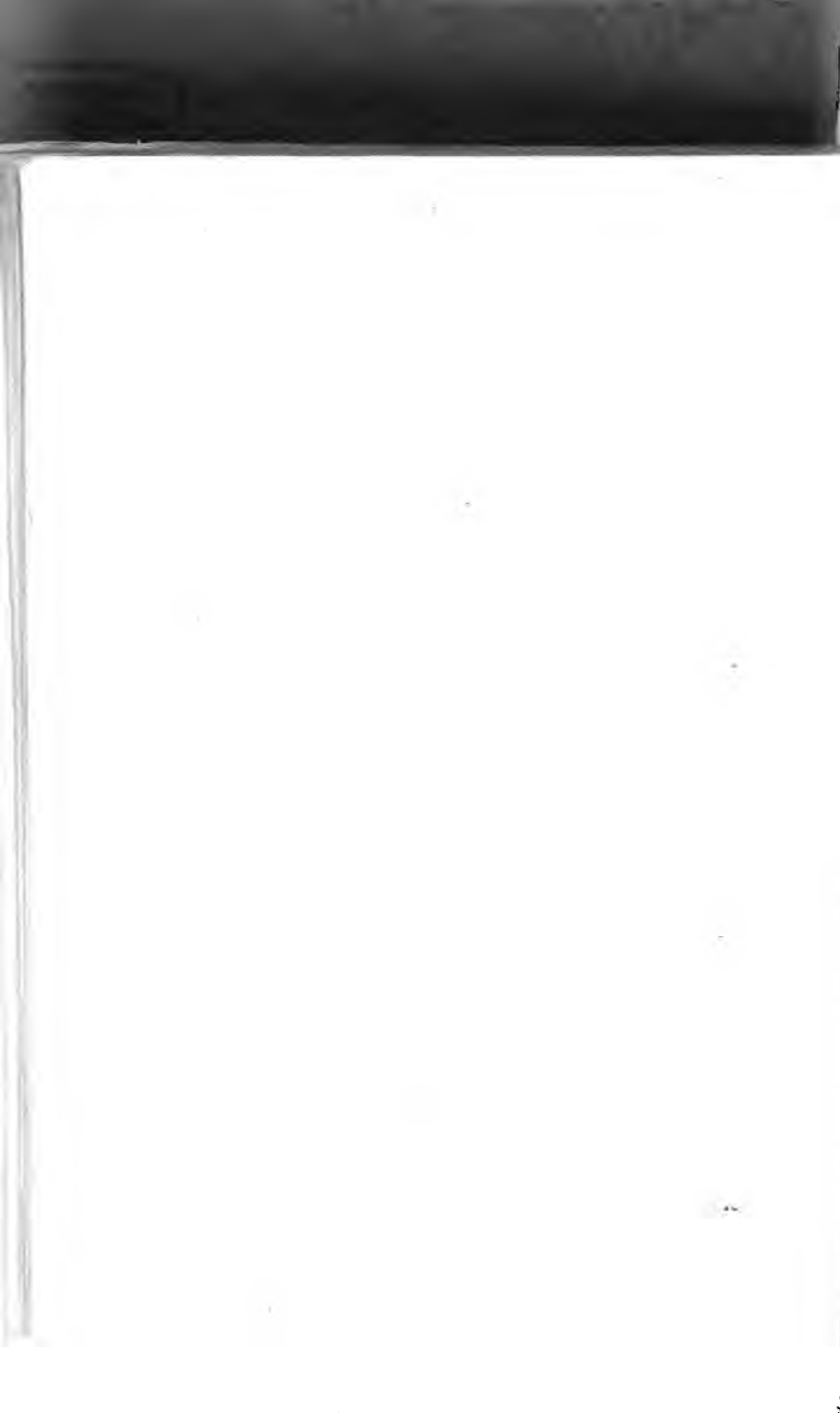
## NOTE

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